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More Wild Charges

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THE Ben Barka kidnapping case in France bids fair to become the greatest French political scandal since the Dreyfuss case of 70 years ago. And the charges grow wilder with each week that passes.

The case, in a nutshell, is that Ben Barka, a left-wing Moroccan politician hostile to King Hassan II, was kidnapped in broad daylight off a Paris street last fall.

The kidnapers were French police agents and the kidnap vehicle was an official police car. The kidnapers took Ben Barka to a villa outside Paris and left him there, where it was presumed until this week that he was murdered.

This much was known by knowledgeable Frenchmen within a week of the October kidnapping. But the French presidential elections lay just ahead. General DeGaulle was making a lot out of the fact that his administration, unlike others, hadn't been and wouldn't be touched by scandals.

Gaullist newspapers played down the story so as not to embarrass the candidate.

But now "l'affaire Ben Barka" has become "le scandale Ben Barka," with a cast of characters right out of Ian Fleming—a king, generals, cabinet ministers, gangsters, stool pigeons and crooked cops.

The latest tune being sung by the Gaullist press is that the American Central Intelligence Agency, ~~our CIA~~ snatched Ben Barka and killed him in order to rid the world of a dangerous leftist and at the same time embarrass the difficult-to-deal-with French president.

Parisians are even beginning to have second thoughts about whether the murder took place. After all, no corpse has turned up.

It is a corking good mystery story, and Paris is understandably titillated by it. But it is a little bit sad to see the French people travel the last mile in disillusionment about their government and their great men. Because of the almost certain involvement of several of his top assistants, DeGaulle's reputation will surely suffer a tarnishing. He will not stand so tall as formerly.